

## ARTICLES

### **The Prayer of the Heart in the Context of Secularization and Pseudo-religious Indifferentism. Missionary Precepts**

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**Abstract:** The spiritual life in a secularized society is affected by the axiological mutations operating within it. Human autonomy – a harmful consequence of secularization – is the ferment of anthropocentrism and desacralization, and is directly responsible for the indifferentism of contemporary man. Prayer – in general – and the prayer of the heart – in particular – are devalued and hijacked in a materialistic, hedonistic and atheistic society, so that the mission of the Church must be reconfigured in terms of a teleological priority, so that knowledge, living and witnessing become the fundamental landmarks of the present-day spiritual life.

**Keywords:** prayer, prayer of the heart, secularization, indifferentism, anthropocentrism, desacralization, spiritual life, materialism, hedonism, atheism.

#### **1. Introduction**

The current context of living and Christian surviving to eternity is influenced by the axiological mutations emerged in the contemporary society: thus, the current society is overwhelmed with secularization and pseudo-religious indifferentism – as its consequence. Christian values are, to a great extent abandoned and/or ignored, “the religious man”, defined by Mircea Eliade, not finding its place and role in a society as such any more. The prayer, as the entire spiritual life – is either eliminated, or substituted by practices which misrepresent it (such as occultly-sectarian meditation of oriental inspiration, powerfully mediatized in a utilitarian-consumerist society).

Prayer ceases to be man’s autonomic, personal and conscious dialogue with God, out of factual ideological reasons: man’s communion with God is

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substituted by current influent ideologies, descending – to a great extent – from the secularization phenomenon. Thus, the authority of contemporary society derives from the ideologized science, scientism representing the defining sample within this perspective; the prevailing ideological dimension is outlined by the triad formed out of naturalism, materialism and atheism, having malefic consequences firstly for the spiritual life of Christians living nowadays.

## **2. Over-Post-Modern Contemporary Coordinates. Fundamental Guide Marks**

A secularized society is not preoccupied any more with the meaning of holiness, sacrality being, in fact, put between brackets. Other guide marks are given to existence – in conformity with “the will” or “fashion of the time” – the revealed truth of God being at the same time ignored; the immediate reality (as part of the pragmatic dimension of contemporary man), is preferred to the perspective of eternity – Church testimonia. Therefore, the existential guide marks get a new signification altogether, the economic prevailing to the spiritual dimension, technique is a priority to culture, politics remodels moral, the body is more important than the soul, and similarly, time becomes more valuable than eternity, all these leading to an axiological reversion between the relative and the Absolute, between man and God. Secularized Western ideology and thinking separated from Christian anthropology, imposing the image of “man without God” – autonomous and all-self-sufficient – as a substitute for “man as a garland of divine creation,” found in a permanent relationship with God. We, therefore, speak of “a new human prototype” which pretends – in the name of an “autonomous” will – that it does not have any more, nor does it feel the need of a relationship with God or the Church.

Cardinal Paul Poupard draws (within this respect) the attention on the emergence of a new human type – *homo indifferens* (“the light-hearted man”), who, by far and profoundly disinterested ignores everything that is religious<sup>2</sup>.

The particularity of contemporaneity, as compared to anterior periods, refers to the fact that nowadays we live a queer form of practical atheism, sometimes extended to those who declare themselves Christians (and here we speak about those “Christians” having nothing in common with the message, principles or Christian life); this practical atheism is, as a rule, non-violent, being the consequence of a quasi-total secularization, which imposes man a relativist pseudo-culture, mingled with an individualist quest for material welfare. The

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<sup>2</sup> See Paul Poupard, *Credința și cultura în cumpăna dintre milenii. Convorbiri cu Patrick Sbalchiero* (Târgu-Lăpuș: Galaxia Gutenberg, 2006), 190; Simona Ștefana Zetea, *Biserica/Indiferentismul religios. Indiferentismul religios, un destin implacabil al Bisericii sau o chemare la reinnoire* (Târgu-Lăpuș: Galaxia Gutenberg, 2007), 347.

unnatural search for these is seen in the dilution of religiously authentic quest, in a syncretistic quasi-spirituality, completely different from the Christian religiosity as revealed foundation.

When we speak about the prevailing over – post-modern coordinates, generating secularization and indifferentism, we must have in mind the syncretistic globalization phenomenon and the one of man and society desacralization. Globalization – in spite of sceptical sociological analyses, which would announce the de-valorisation of the presence of religion in the public space – is responsible, during the latest period, with religious resurgence, favoured by the emphatic relativization of religious identities, which paradoxically led to the revival of the religious in man's and society's life, revival which is required by the need of a quest for identity and affiliation, the quest for new principles of orientation which ensure goal, meaning and signification<sup>3</sup>. In other words, secularization produced a vacuum in relation to traditional religiosity, a vacuum which claims "to be filled" with existential meaning; and so it happens that a new pseudo-religious profile is re-seated in a central position in society next to the secular ideology; we speak of *a new religiosity*, like a certain type of religious experience which folds on secular mentality, and this preserves too little from the identity structure of religious traditions. Syncretism defines, to a great extent, this neo-religious phenomenon, where traditional and identity elements lose value through the re-proliferation of new syncretic ones.

*Globalization* supposes a certain type of *universalism* which involves accepting the world globally and adapting to this in the sense of passing from *singularity* to *community*. This universalism with ecumenical character claims that the opposite of a crush between civilizations must be the *dialogue* between civilizations, within the perspective of identifying a new common background and of common values to all religious traditions. This identification must not lead in any way, to some syncretistic balancing of all traditional religious identities. All this is about "a global identity" which would not envisage a relativization of particularities in flat and unique measure, but rather would lead in a dynamic way to an acceptance from the part of all religious traditions of all these identities, without confusion and mixture. Within this context it is stated, therefore, the forming of a global religious space, where this religious plurality must be made aware of, accepted and promoted, it being responsible of the peace, good cohabitation and the harmonical ecumenism between all religions, reduced to simple religious traditions. Therefore, it is stated that globalization can support the valorisation of some principles of common foundation to a globalist dimension, Hans Kung being the one offering a framework of understanding the recalibration of these

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<sup>3</sup> Natalia Vlas, *Globalizarea și fenomenul religios la începutul secolului XXI* (Cluj-Napoca: Presa Universitară Clujeană, 2008), 136.

principles in a discursive logic: “There will not be peace between nations without peace between religions, there will not be a successful dialogue between religions without considering some common ethical standards for the entire planet. The Earth would not survive, thus, without global ethics”<sup>4</sup>.

*De-sacralization*, in exchange, is related to the equilibrium between the sacred and the profane, which is perturbed in the modern and post-modern world, this finding itself in a natural relationship only for those who develop a special sense of the Absolute, rightly named by Mircea Eliade with the title *homo religiosus*. In the contemporary materialistic world, there is a tendency of taking over the profane by force and adding excessive value to it, in consequence, this is submitted to a strange alchemy which leads ultimately to *de-sacralization*. There are historians of religion which find in the *de-sacralization* phenomenon the presence of some sacred-by-excellence moments. Harvey Cox is trying to argument three stages (imagine, theological) of de-sacralization<sup>5</sup>. The first names “the Creation” a *de-sacralization* of the world. The second brings to attention “the Exodus” as a *de-sacralization* of the political. Last but not least, the third one refers to “the Covenant on Sinai” understood by the author as a *de-sacralization* of values. Paradoxically, the origins of de-sacralization would be biblical, and nowadays, - within the context of a digitally coordinated society – we would only unconsciously re-take (it seems eternally) this strange cycle of de-sacralization.

### **2.1. Secularization – An Expression of Man’s Autonomy towards God**

Secularization proliferates in an alert rhythm in the entire Christianity; we assist to an evolution, without precedence, of the secularization process in today’s Europe, responsible of the clearer antagonism between certain institutions of the State and the Church, antagonism which drapes the form either of ignorance, or of a hostile attitude towards God and the Church. To this, one may add the personal option character which religion, in general, and religious faith, especially preserve against the odds that the entire human existence is developed within the secularization coordinates in contemporaneity, with the quasi-total ignorance of religious-moral axiological references to Christianity<sup>6</sup>.

The way the French Theologian Olivier Clement would underline,<sup>7</sup> the essential characteristic of a secularized society is seen within the coordinates of

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<sup>4</sup> Hans Kung and Karl-Joseph Kuschel, eds., *A Global Ethic: The Declaration of the Parliament of the World's Religions* (New York: Continuum, 1993), 18-21.

<sup>5</sup> Harvey Cox, *La Cité séculière. Essai théologique sur la sécularisation et urbanisation* (Tournai: Casterman, 1968).

<sup>6</sup> Cf. W. R. Crockett. „Le christianisme et la culture dans la société modern sécularisée,” *La Maison-Dieu* 179 (1989): 47; H. Haring, *Glaube ja-Kirche nein? Die Zukunft christlicher Konfession* (Darmstadt: Wissenschaftliche Buchgesellschaft, 2002), 40f.

<sup>7</sup> Cf. Olivier Clement, *Viața din inima noastră* (Târgoviște: Pandora-M, 2001), 47.

preserving absolute quietness about God; to this quietness, unfortunately, one may add states as embarrassment, inhibition, bashfulness and even the feeling of the obscene experienced by Christians when speaking publicly about God. This unimaginable reality from Antiquity or Medieval Era was reached by a gradual process which started once with the period of Renaissance. We speak here of a process which changed from the grounds the axiological foundations of modern society, starting with the problematic related to knowledge and morality, a determinant role in this destructive process addressed to Christianity belonging to modern sciences. Thus, gradually, sciences started to ignore theology and its moral principles, constituting their own technical-scientific universe and their own symbolic language; at the same time, theology was not considered “the queen of sciences” any more (as within the period of the Medieval Era), and the Church, in its turn was “disowned” of its – almost universal – competences within the social environment<sup>8</sup>.

From a strictly historical perspective, secularization must have been understood at the beginning – the way Arnold Loen states – as de-sacralization of the world, as a break from and distancing from God and His values, reaching even to God’s banning out of the world. This thing does not mean that “God would have really been present within the world and now He has left it, but it means only that God was distanced from man’s conscience”<sup>9</sup>. In consequence, secularization does not proliferate within the space of existence any more, but it unfolds like a dynamical process within “the space” of man’s conscience; thus, paradoxically, secularization does not really take place, but it effectively is accomplished within man’s strictly subjective field of interpretation, within the imminently rational reality – of philosophical, scientific or cultural nature –, where the imagination is a priority to human creation at all levels. In other words, God did not leave the world (which He Himself created) as a result of secularization but is and will always be present in it as He used to be<sup>10</sup>. The secular “novelty” refers to ignoring and silencing everything about God by the contemporary man, whose religious vocation lost itself as a result of perverting his spiritual sense and capacity; for the secularized man, God and the sacred are so camouflaged that They do not “exist” anymore.

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<sup>8</sup> Klauspeter Blaser. *La théologie en XX-ème siècle* (Lausanne: L’Age d’homme, 1995), 132; cf. Bryan Wilson, *Contemporary Transformation of Religion* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1967), 267.

<sup>9</sup> A. E. Loen. *Säkularisation. Von der wahren Voraussetzung und angeblichen Gottlosigkeit der Wissenschaft* (München: Chr. Kaiser, 1965), 11.

<sup>10</sup> Theodor Piffl-Percevic and Alfred Stirnemann, *Ökumenische Hoffnungen. Neun Pro Oriente-Symposien 1965 bis 1970* (Wien: Tyrotia Verlag, 1984), 64; Pr. dr. Nicolae Achimescu, *Religii în dialog* (Iași: Trinitas, 2005), 388.

Secularization remains an abyssal break of man from God and it represents the beginning of a process of autonomation of man in relation to His Creator. Man's autonomy is seen in the Eastern patristic tradition as being "the cause and content of sin"<sup>11</sup> and it affects man on all plans. Therefore, through his declared reason as autonomous, man does not recognize God as Trinity, as being transcendent and immanent altogether, he does not recognize Him as being the Creator, the Proniator, the Saviour or the Sanctifier and man's revolt against God extends to the Church of God, divinely created, as well. In consequence, the Church is marginalized or even eliminated from the public space, it is de-valourised in her message and as dialogue partner for the current secular institutions, and when it is not silenced, it is tried with the calumny that it is an obsolete institution of medieval type, and it is an obstacle standing in the way of the development and happiness of contemporary man<sup>12</sup>.

## ***2.2. Pseudo-Religious Indifferentism – The Non-Aggressive Face of Contemporary Atheism***

The modern metamorphosis of the world is founded on the distancing from God, manifested in a quasi-total ignorance of Him, at the same time with the religious-moral values of Christianity<sup>13</sup>. We hereby make an important statement, that we do not speak of an atheistic or agnostic world, but we rather refer to a world relativist and indifferent to religion: therefore, the modern concept referring to *the death of God*, as well as the entire hanging of the occidental cultural nihilism formed themselves as a real framework which favoured the emergence and proliferation – without precedence in the Christian world – of pseudo-religious indifferentism<sup>14</sup>.

There is a real paradox (we should call it existential), which places into a directly proportional relationship the faith in God and the contemporary man's estrangement to the Church; faith in God does not have as object the Living God of the Revelation, but He is reduced to the vague idea that He is a superior force, a vital energy, an impersonal principle or an implacable destiny presented in the terms of fatality. Faith in God – the Holy Trinity is, in fact, rejected, the

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<sup>11</sup> Pr. Prof. Univ. Dr. Gheorghe Istodor, *Misiunea Bisericii ca activitate permanentă și practică a Bisericii* (București: Sigma, 2006), 138.

<sup>12</sup> Pr. Prof. Univ. Dr. Gheorghe Istodor, "The Church's Mission in the Face of Great Challenges that Come from the Sphere of Modern and Postmodern Science," in *The 2nd Virtual International Conference on the Dialogue Between Science and Theology, November 5-11, 2015*, volume 2 (Research Center on the Dialogue between Science & Theology, 2015), 295.

<sup>13</sup> John MacLaughlin, *Indifferentism, Or Is One Religion as Good as Another?* (Potosi, WI: St. Athanasius Press, 2009), 101.

<sup>14</sup> Jean Pierre Jossua, Claude Geffré, and Marcus Lefébure, *Indifference to Religion*. (Edinburgh: T. & T. Clark, 1983), 52.

Saviour Jesus Christ being regarded at His best as a Wise or a Prophet, yet, in other dehumanizing perspectives He is blasphemed to being a simple man, overwhelmed with passions and sensual desires. Those who, emphatically, claim to be believers are those who formally witness a certain relation with the tradition (understood as human custom), which leads with certainty to ignoring God and His Church. We, nevertheless, observe the intrinsic relationship between the distance from God and any form of ecclesial indifference, both forms leading to a lack of any preoccupation about God and about authentic religiosity. Regarded from this perspective, indifferentism represents a form of disbelief, more radical than atheism, the lack of religious preoccupation being more serious than being aware of the existence of God (which supposes an argumentation, a preoccupation – be it even negative – towards problems related to God). In its turn, agnosticism is not such a radical form of disbelief<sup>15</sup>, even if it supposes giving up any effort to know God, justified through the fact that God and the religious problems do not enter into the horizon of experimental sciences. Free-thinkers are less unfaithful than the indifferent, even if they do not recognize a personal God, yet, they accept the existence of a vital force in the universe, having a tendency to be inclined towards deism, pantheism, humanism or rationalism. Indifferentism is separated from all these attitudes through the fact that it does not place into discussion the problem of God's existence or non-existence, considering as insignificant and without value all religious problems. Therefore, one may state that indifferentism is the most radical form of disbelief<sup>16</sup>.

Between the factors that lead to the emergence and development of religious indifferentism, one may recall to mind those of a cultural nature – secularization in itself being considered a very complex cultural process; then, we have pluralism, as alternative to the unity in Christian faith of the Church and finally, other factors that facilitate the spread of religious indifferentism include the urbanization, the industrialization or the migration phenomenon<sup>17</sup>. The common factor of these challenges remains the uprooting – as loss of the religious identity – and the substitution of religious and moral values with: success, efficiency, power, pleasure, libertinage etc<sup>18</sup>. In the contemporary pastorship, indifferentism remains the effect of a contemporary triumphalist, positivist mentality founded on the antagonism between science and religion, a mentality incapable to penetrate and understand mystagog Christianity.

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<sup>15</sup> Alan Richardson and John Bowden, eds., *A New Dictionary of Christian Theology* (London: SCM Press, 1989), 10.

<sup>16</sup> Zetea, *Biserica/Indiferentismul religios*, 276-77.

<sup>17</sup> Synnøve Bendixsen, *The Religious Identity of Young Muslim Women in Berlin: An Ethnographic Study* (Leiden: Brill, 2013), 83.

<sup>18</sup> Zetea, *Biserica/Indiferentismul religios*, 296-97.



### 3. Prayer of the Heart – a Foundation and Condition of Contemporary Spiritual Life

In a world more and more secularized, more de-sacralized and, unfortunately, more and more de-Christianized, we find out that through God's Providence – an expression of God's love and His mercy, we may theologize and some of us may even live the experience of praying in a most authentic and profound state, as an indispensable premise of receiving the Charism of contemplating the Light of God. When we refer to praying in its most authentic and profound state, we make reference, without doubt to what, in theology, is called "the prayer of the heart", or Jesus' prayer, mentioning that we hereby speak of the prayer of the *mind* descended into *the heart*.

When the Fathers speak about the darkness of mind, they do not understand this as madness, as disturbed reason, they would make a distinction between *the mind* (νοῦς) and *reason* (λογική); thus, through Adam's fall, not *the reason* was affected but *the mind*. We mention here that through *mind*, one may understand the state of seeing God, state that was darkened by sin. The Fathers did not find any clue that the reason of man was disturbed, modern science shows us that man functions very well in the brain. Therefore, when the Fathers say that the mind of the first created darkened, they do not speak about their reason but about another soul energy whose centre is *the heart*. Next to mind darkness, the sin of the forefathers means substituting mind with reason and mixing the latter with passions and the environment. *The Mind* before the Fall used to move towards God with enthusiasm, being free of the energy of *reason*, passions and the environment. Nevertheless, when it remained "without prayer", it confounded itself with reason, with passions and with the environment; this thing is defined as "fall", which means, from a patristic point of view, the identification of the energies of *the mind* with the energies of *reason*. In conclusion, the forefathers' sin is *the mind without prayer*, its darkening and its identification with the reason, with the passions and the environment, the consequences being terrible<sup>19</sup>.

In the Fathers' theology, *the heart* is seen as the centre of man's spiritual life. Thus, Holy Apostle Paul speaks about the mysterious man of *the heart* (1 Pet 3:4), *the heart* being the essence of a person, in which the mystery of human freedom manifests itself. The Savior also says that from *the heart* emerge bad thoughts, murdering, adultery or dissipation, and Saint Macarius speaks about the fact that *the heart* is the ruler of the entire body. Therefore, Saint Theophanous the Recluse states that *the heart* is the spring of human acts, and Saint Nicodemus

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<sup>19</sup> Ierotheos Vlahos, *Dogmatica empirică după învățăturile prin viu grai ale Părintelui Ioannis Romanidis* (Iași: Doxologia, 2017).



the Agiorite speaks about a double potentiality of *the heart*: 1) *a heart* as passion depth and 2) *a heart* as “God’s dwelling”.

Jesus’ Prayer or *the prayer of the heart* is: “Lord Jesus Christ, Son of God, have mercy on me, the sinner”. Initially, it was uttered without mentioning the word “the sinner”, a word which was added to the prayer later on. This used to be a prayer in practice with the byzantine and Slavic Christians. It literally meant “mental practice”, a thing which can be confusing because it makes a too tight connection with the environment of rational thinking, especially when we speak about praying, words more proper for Jesus’ prayer being the adjectives “interior” and “sacred”. The Church’s theologizing makes reference to stages in praying with Jesus’ prayer, equivalent to multiplying the spiritual steps of the faithful Christian. We, therefore, speak about certain stages, the first refers to practising and working on Jesus’ prayer, this stage being accessible to everyone. The second stage makes Jesus’ prayer to be joined by the adjectives “spiritual”, “seeing” or “of the heart” and it represents a progress in comparison with the first stage, being described as a journey to the centre of *the heart*, where the prayer extent in depth and the stages of deepness are the treasure of a human person. The last stage makes that Jesus’ prayer to become during a first phase, noetic, namely, to be active only in *mind* or spirit, and then it should be descended into *the heart*, namely it should be seized with that energy from the centre of the spirit or of the heart, making the entire being of man to be well-off with the prayer<sup>20</sup>.

According to some Holy Fathers there are eight stages in the prayer of the heart and according to some others there are three or five. We will hereby shortly list the five stages in the prayer of the heart for an adequate exemplification and understanding of Jesus’ prayer: 1) the prayer of the mind as the first stage of uttering the words “Lord Jesus Christ, Son of God, have mercy on me, the sinner”, where the entire attention is focused on that uttering<sup>21</sup>; 2) the prayer of the mind in the heart makes that the mind, during praying, goes deeper and deeper to the centre of the heart<sup>22</sup>; 3) the unceasing prayer or the one moving independently, where the heart, with every beat repeats independently the words of the prayer<sup>23</sup>. 4) the pure prayer, where contemplation makes possible extasy, which determines

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<sup>20</sup> Christopher David Leonard Johnson, “Authority and Tradition in Contemporary Understandings of Hesychasm and the Jesus Prayer,” PhD Dissertation (Edinburgh: The University of Edinburgh, 2009), 28; Bogdan Moroiu, “Rugăciunea inimii la Sfântul Paisie Velicikovski,” PhD Dissertation (Constanța: University of Constanța, 2013), 126.

<sup>21</sup> Archbishop Paul of Finland, *The Faith We Hold* (Crestwood, NY: St. Vladimir’s Seminary Press, 1980), 84; Moroiu, “Rugăciunea inimii,” 126.

<sup>22</sup> *Pelerinul rus* (București: Sophia, 2009), 89; Moroiu, “Rugăciunea inimii,” 126.

<sup>23</sup> Radu Ciobanu, *Mic dicționar de cultură religioasă* (Timișoara: Helicon, 1994), 214; Moroiu, “Rugăciunea inimii,” 126.

mind-stillness<sup>24</sup>; 5) the prayer as spiritual seeing or the prayer without praying, which is accomplished when the mind crossed the border of pure praying and there are no more senses, control, freedom, tears or meekness<sup>25</sup>.

Jesus' prayer is characteristic to Orthodox monasticism and according to our tradition the origin of praying dates back to the Savior's times. Patriarchs Callistos and Ignatius say that the founder of this prayer is the Savior Himself. Thus, studying the words of Clement the Alexandrine, we will see the relation between the ideal of perfection of the Christian gnostic and of those practising "hesychasm". The development and generalization of this prayer must be put in relation with the emergence of monasticism, the first monks practising short prayers, named by the Blessed Augustin "orationes jocolatas"<sup>26</sup>. References on the prayer of the heart come from the entire Christian Levant, both from monks in the desert and those in monasteries, ever since the first centuries. We meet this prayer at the Cappadocian Saints – Gregory of Nazianzus and Gregory of Nyssa –, at Saint John Chrysostom or at Saint Saba, the founder of the Great Lavra of Mar Saba in the Vth Century AD. We also find it mentioned at Saint Maximus the Confessor, the deep thinking of the Confessor on praying being necessary to be mentioned. Saint Gregory of Sinai speaks of the beginning of the prayer of the mind as being the cathartic work of the Holy Spirit. Saint Gregory of Palama says about Jesus' prayer that it leads to unity in mind. With the Saints Gregory of Sinai and Gregory Palama, one very important moment of monasticism comes to perfection, namely hesychasm<sup>27</sup>. Finally, Saint Maximus the Confessor in "Answers to Tallassee" in Philocaly volume III, says that "the prayer of that who practises it at the same time with theologizing is the mysterious silence, time in which the mind is, by denying things (in the sense of overcoming them), made worthy of the unity beyond understanding and knowledge. Thus, the prayer as mysterious silence is the pure prayer"<sup>28</sup>.

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<sup>24</sup> Sfântul Isaac Sirul, "Cuvântul XXXII: Despre rugăciunea curată," in *Filocalia sau culegere din scrierile sfinților părinți care arată cum se poate omul curați, lumina și desăvârși*, vol. X (București: EIBMBOR, 1981), 180; Moroiu, "Rugăciunea inimii," 126.

<sup>25</sup> Sfântul Isaac Sirul, "Epistola III," in *Filocalia*, vol. X (București: EIBMBOR, 1981), 498; Moroiu, "Rugăciunea inimii," 127.

<sup>26</sup> Corneliu Zăvoianu, "Rugăciunea lui Iisus în Imperiul bizantin. Răspândirea ei în Peninsula balcanică și în Țările române," *Glasul Bisericii* 11-12 (1981): 1100; Moroiu, "Rugăciunea inimii," 129.

<sup>27</sup> Thomas Keating, *The Foundations for Centering Prayer and the Christian Contemplative Life* (New York: The Continuum International Publishing Group Inc, 2006); Moroiu, "Rugăciunea inimii," 131.

<sup>28</sup> Sfântul Maxim Mărturisitorul, *Răspunsuri către Talasie*, in *Filocalia*, vol. III, (București: Harisma, 1994), 116.

#### **4. The Missionary Perspective of Living by Religious Precepts Given the Conditions of Secularization and Pseudo-Religious Indifferentism**

There is an inter-dependence between anthropocentrism, de-sacralization and secularization: the anthropocentrism led to the world's and man's de-sacralization through man's tendency of taking out the prophane from beneath the authority of the sacred, then the de-sacralization gave birth to the process of secularization of the world, through which it was being tried to take out, progressively, the religious from social and cultural life, provoking an ecologist crisis founded on autonomic cosmology. To anthropocentrism – as excessive trust in human forces –, one would answer with the tragical fideism of the Reform – with its unilateral trust in the force of divine grace “sola” gratia –, so that afterwards, the illuminist humanism should give trust to contemporary atheism, namely to the auto-deification of man lacking an authentic Christian deification<sup>29</sup>. Anthropocentrism represents the process through which man starts to adore his own reason, the essence of illuminism and secularization being Kant's syntagma: “dare to know”. With this, therefore, would start a real “century of lights”, founded on a so called doctrine of progress which perpetuated until nowadays, as an emancipation emerged from the dogmatic pressure, from tradition or superstition”<sup>30</sup>.

The scientific- technological development remains a consequence of the secularization of the world phenomenon, with destructive results in the spiritual plan. Thus, in spite of a selfishly claimed autonomy, man becomes the prisoner of the immanent world, where he lives the feeling of distancing from God and makes the experience of irrational and demonic forces, fulfilling the truth in Christ's word: “For what profit is it to a man if he gains the whole world, and loses his own soul?” (Mt 16:26)<sup>31</sup>.

The autonomous-secular man creates an individualist- hedonist society, by passing from Theo-centrism to anthropocentrism, responsible of this mutation being the occidental theology, which confounded God's transcendence with His absence from the Creation<sup>32</sup>. Nevertheless, man's religiosity – with an ontological substratum –, cannot be suspended or eliminated, but it can be embezzled; and so, it happens that the autonomous man creates a type of “post-secularist religion” with a double configuration of syncretic style, as it includes in its structure on

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<sup>29</sup> See Tache Sterea, *Credință și misiune* (București: Editura Sfintei Arhiepiscopii a Bucureștilor, 1999), 131.

<sup>30</sup> Istodor, *Misiunea creștină*, 162.

<sup>31</sup> Pr. Prof. Dr. Dumitru Popescu, *Ortodoxie și Contemporaneitate* (București: Diogene, 1996), 68-69.

<sup>32</sup> Istodor, *Misiunea creștină*, 162.

the one hand, elements with an illuminist-secularist character, on the other hand, traditional religious elements. This form of pseudo-religiosity, highlights the profound tendency of the man created by God to permanently look for answers to his existential problems; the big tragedy is that – in his autonomy towards God -, he does not find “credible answers even in traditional religion, nor in the pseudo-religious secularist attitude, and in his perpetual search he represents the meaning of a protest towards both”<sup>33</sup>.

Secularization makes that the Church be seen as an institution of the State which does not differ from the other institutions, which fight for supremacy in the contemporary society, being perceived, rather, like a creation of people and not of God through the Christ – in the Holy Spirit; we speak, in this sense, of real “hermeneutical grids” of Secularism which Christ’s Church has to face, these being responsible of confusion, of ideologization, of pseudo-religious pluralism, of a-moralism, in a climate of mistrust and doubt which leads to de-structuring and dehumanization<sup>34</sup>. Last but not least, man’s and society’s secularization remain responsible of the a-religious indifferentism of contemporary man, indifferentism which affects man’s religiosity and his spiritual living to a greater extent even than the extensive process of secularization.

Because of the secularization phenomenon, we assist today to a means of recomposing the society or to society mutations. Unfortunately, this is a reality which re-defines all aspects of modern society, either we speak of the cultural ones, or of the social, familial, political, religious or economic ones.

## 5. Conclusions

The prayer of the heart experience, as a premise of contemplating God’s Light, is quantified and valorised to a missionary dimension, by sending to a real triad of life and Orthodox theologizing formed of *knowledge, living and witnessing*. When speaking of knowledge, we must mention that we do not send in any way to the knowledge of individualist type, about which either Varlaam – Saint Gregory Palama’s opponent – was speechifying, or the different older or newer gnostic systems. Missiology – and the entire Orthodox Theology vehemently reject to consider salvation as being equivalent to strictly philosophical knowledge, as Varlaam from Calabria used to do and it also strongly rejects the knowledge of gnostic type – either when we speak of the Gnosticism of centuries II-III AD or we refer to the modern gnostic systems in which knowledge is more important than salvation. The knowledge we refer to flows out of man’s real communion

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<sup>33</sup> Pr. Prof. Dr. Nicolae Achimescu, *Noile Mișcări Religioase* (Cluj-Napoca: Limes, 2002), 51.

<sup>34</sup> See Dr. Gheorghe Petraru, *Teologie Fundamentală și Misionară. Ecumenism* (Iași: Performantica, 2006), 251.

with the Holy Trinity, knowledge which has a profound soteriological character, according to the Saviour's word from the Hierarchs' prayer: "And this is eternal life, that they may know You, the only true God, and Jesus Christ You Whom You have sent" (Jn 17:3). Afterwards, to *knowledge* we must add *living*, making the statement that the authenticity of living depends on the authenticity and Orthodoxy of *knowledge*. In other words, we state with certainty that there cannot be a superficial living man or a man ignorant to what belongs to the mystery of God, which is at the same time also the mystery of our salvation. From *knowledge* and *living* we later on have *witnessing*, which is fundamental and indispensable to our effort of salvation. Therefore, concluding, we speak from a missionary point of view of this interdependence between knowledge, living and witnessing which lead man to a state in which the prayer of Jesus is added value – as a premise of contemplating or seeing God – and it gives man the possibility to remain in soteriological communion with God in a world overwhelmed with secularization and indifferentism.